

# The Labor-Greens Climate Wars in Australia: How it all began and why it must end

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*Market-based climate mitigation policies—emissions trading and carbon pricing—disproportionately harm working-class and poor people (fossil-fuel workers denied Just Transition and households struggling to pay passed-through decarbonisation costs). Such policies undermine support for mitigation. A social-democratic climate policy would utilise state action for the common good: mandating an orderly phasing out of fossil fuels with transition plans for the workers affected. Since 1992 trade unions have urged such an approach. Instead, the Australian Labor Party government of Kevin Rudd attempted a neoliberal emissions trading scheme so badly designed it would have prevented emissions reductions and handed billions of dollars to fossil-fuel interests. The Labor government ignored objections raised by the Australian Greens, because it believed Greens would not affect the outcome given the numbers in the Senate. It negotiated instead with the Liberal Party, which extracted changes that further alienated the Greens; then Liberals defeated the weakened legislation anyway. However, two Liberal Senators crossed the floor to support the scheme, so Labor could have passed the legislation with the Greens' support it had spurned. Labor persistently portrays the Greens' opposition as the reason the CPRS failed, never the double dealing of the Liberal Party nor its own mishandling of negotiations. Blaming the Greens distracts attention from the fact that its neoliberal climate policy was unfair and ineffectual, and that the social-democratic mitigation policies advocated by unions and the Greens would be more efficient, more effective and much fairer.*

KEY WORDS: Climate mitigation; emissions trading; carbon pricing; Australian Labor Party; Australian Greens

## Introduction

The deal brokered on 27 March 2023 between the Labor government and the Greens was hailed as 'the first concrete steps on climate in a decade'. The Greens could not persuade the government to heed the science and rule out new coal and gas projects but did secure a ceiling on overall emissions of the biggest 215 emitters of 140 million tonnes a year (which will limit leeway to approve new coal and gas projects), a cap on the amount of pollution corporations can write off with offsets, and the subjecting of any new coal and gas projects to rigorous tests that account for emissions from the outset (Robertson 2023).

The Greens negotiated these improvements against a backdrop of negative Labor Party commentary about their role in opposing the Rudd government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS). Will the Greens behave better this time was the question posed by government ministers, echoing the regular refrains of Labor MPs and supporters down the years. For example, on the tenth anniversary of the defeat of the CPRS, Labor claimed that emissions would be 200m tonnes lower if the Greens had supported the CPRS (Martin 2019).

Yet the Rudd Labor government did not pursue Greens' backing for the CPRS because it believed Greens' support alone would be insufficient to pass the legislation in the Senate. So it ignored Greens' criticisms and negotiated instead with the Liberal Party, making the CPRS worse and worse with every concession it made to try to secure Liberal support. As events played out—described below—the Labor government did, unexpectedly, require the Greens' support it had spurned. Despite the manifest treachery of the Liberal Party, and its own mishandling of negotiations with other parties, Labor habitually portrays the Greens as the chief villain, so never interrogates its attempt to create a market in rights to pollute. In the current context this traditional blame game has distracted attention from the inadequacy of the Safeguard Mechanism and Labor's 43 per cent emissions reduction target by implying the greatest danger was not fossil fuels but Greens behaving badly again.

The regularity with which Labor politicians and party activists vilify the Greens for opposing the CPRS—and its renewed energy recently—calls for calm consideration of how and why emissions trading schemes are inefficient,

ineffective and unfair, and the CPRS especially so. This article also seeks to explain why Labor opted for an inherently problematic policy; why the Greens wanted to improve it or, failing that, oppose it; and why Labor's policy choice undermined support for climate mitigation, providing fossil fuel interests and the Coalition with the political ammunition to undo the Gillard government's carbon tax and wedge the Labor Party on climate policies at the 2019 election.

### **The trouble with emissions trading**

Emissions trading schemes are grounded in neoclassical/neoliberal economic theory (Stilwell 2011: 110). By 2007 neoliberal thinking had become so firmly embedded in the corridors of power it had changed the thinking of Labor politicians and advisers (Scott 2000; Conley 2001; Burgmann 2004). Their default mindset had arguably shifted from social-democratic inclinations focused on state action and social justice to greater trust in market 'solutions', such as carbon trading (Rosewarne 2010/2011).

Had the climate crisis occurred under the Chifley government of the late 1940s or the Whitlam government of the early 1970s, it is easy to imagine that these Labor governments would have used state power to mitigate this public, planetary harm. In the early nineteenth century, governments abolished slavery by legislating against it, not erecting a slave trading reduction scheme. More recently, because chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) deplete the ozone layer, the Montreal Protocol of 1989 phased out their manufacture. A CFC trading scheme would have been an absurdly ineffectual way to deal with the problem. Thanks to governments simply outlawing CFC production, the hole in the ozone layer is recovering. By contrast, an emissions trading scheme, even though it limits the number of permits to be issued, is hazardous because it marketises the environment, creating individually saleable rights to violate our collective interest (Stilwell 2011: 114).

When Labor won 'the world's first climate change election' on 24 November 2007 (Glover 2007), Kevin Rudd had promised to meet 'the great moral challenge of our generation' with decisive action to reduce emissions (Age 31 March 2007; Rudd 2007). Political scientists largely agree that climate change was the most decisive issue of the campaign, with global warming foremost among the concerns of voters who swung the election for Labor (Brohe et al. 2009: 199; Jackman 2008: 107-108; Bean and McAllister 2008; Watson and Browne 2008: 6). Opinion polls at the time also indicated most people wanted more effective action than the proposed emissions trading scheme (ETS) (Climate Institute 2007). So why did the Rudd government mispend its massive mandate to mitigate climate change on an inefficient, ineffective and unfair scheme?

Emissions trading schemes are popular with policy makers prone to market-oriented 'solutions' to problems, including those caused by the operation of markets. In the case of emission trading schemes, a well-placed group of 'experts' whose material interests are served by their creation, lobby politicians, public servants and the public on behalf of such schemes—for example accounting and law firms who benefit from legislation that creates a trade in emissions permits.

Agnes Koh describes this 'carbon-trading lobby' as 'those who see a buck to be made in the price on carbon'. Amongst interviews with key players, she cites then Shadow Minister for Climate Change Greg Hunt saying of emissions trading: 'You've got the banking, trading and services sector. They're like, "Gosh we really want this, because we can make an awful lot of money trading permits"'. Former Howard government adviser (but mitigation advocate) Guy Pearse told Koh that the carbon trading conferences then happening around the country were funded by the carbon-trading lobby 'who are looking to make a dollar out of the carbon trade' (Koh 2010: 44).

Economists concerned about climate change—but entranced by market-based 'solutions'—are an important part of the carbon-trading lobby, providing ideological nourishment to those with a pecuniary interest in such legislation (for example, Academy of the Social Sciences 2020). The carbon-trading lobby presents emissions trading as straightforward—'efficient, effective and fair', according to the Academy of the Social Sciences. Yet emissions trading schemes have 'a complex institutional architecture to oversee trading, entailing substantial costs' (Rosewarne 2010/2011: 46-7). They have little impact on emissions but undoubtedly enrich the carbon-trading lobby: the accounting, law and other firms employed to deal with their complexities (Burgmann and Baer 2012: 117-124). There is evidence, too, from the European Union that the opportunity to gain windfall profits from its emissions trading scheme attracted heavy lobbying activity on behalf of such schemes by the emitting industries themselves (Laing et al. 2014: 515)—the carbon lobby weighing in on behalf of the carbon-trading lobby.

The extent to which the Labor Party, like most parties, has been prey to the carbon lobby is well documented (Wilkinson 2020); less well understood is its capture by the carbon-trading lobby, facilitated by the decline of its social-democratic imagination under the remorseless impact of neoliberalism. This is the back story to its ill-fated faith in emissions trading as a mechanism to mitigate climate change, the reason why it wasted precious political capital on a market-based 'solution'.

Emissions trading schemes have not been sufficiently successful in reducing emissions to justify the huge

problems they otherwise cause for climate mitigation initiatives. An exhaustive academic evaluation in 2014 of the European Union's emissions trading scheme (ETS), introduced in 2005, found that disentangling its impact from other factors was complex, but concluded that attributable emission savings were only 2–4 per cent of total capped emissions. The EU ETS had affected investment decisions in very limited ways, insufficient to drive the large long-term investment decisions 'that decarbonisation ultimately requires' and 'more targeted supports—notably the renewable energy policies—may be more directly impactful' (Laing et al. 2014: 516). There was 'an overwhelming general consensus' in the studies evaluated that 'the scale of impact so far is limited to a fraction of what is necessary to deliver the types of long-term capital projects needed to meet the long-term targets that the EU has set out' (Laing et al. 2014: 512).

A 2015 survey of 142 countries was even more critical: it found that countries without carbon trading markets have increased emissions by around 1 per cent per annum and countries with carbon trading markets have reduced emissions by around 1 per cent per annum, inadequate to meet IPCC targets. In any case, it concluded that these miniscule reductions have largely been the result of other policies, such as feed-in tariffs (Corporate Europe Observatory 2015). At best, the empirical evidence for any benefits suggests correlation with the existence of carbon trading markets rather than causation.

There is also concerning evidence that carbon pricing undermines better emissions-reduction policies. For example, around 2015 the UK government sought to weaken energy efficiency measures and renewable energy targets on the grounds that these could collapse the carbon price. The Corporate Europe Observatory concluded that emissions trading schemes are designed to allow polluters to delay implementing emission cuts, are riddled with loopholes and are dangerous distractions from genuine measures to cut emissions (Corporate Europe Observatory 2015).

Carbon pricing allows the cost of decarbonisation to be avoided by the corporations that profit from fossil fuels and transferred instead to consumers—and the poorer the consumer the more s/he pays in effect. Studies of the EU ETS provide 'compelling empirical evidence to support the existence of ... cost pass-through, not only in electricity but also in industrial sectors'. Companies have varying degrees of ability to pass through carbon costs to consumers; and this pricing power is often high, particularly in markets where demand is inelastic (Laing et al. 2014: 514–515).

Then there is the problem of fraud and gaming to which emissions trading schemes, even if well designed, are

especially vulnerable. All commodity markets contain some illegal activity, but carbon markets are particularly susceptible to fraud because of the nature of the commodity being traded. Carbon, unlike corn or oil, is not a tangible product (Corporate Europe Observatory 2015). The EU's ETS has consistently seen businesses pass on carbon 'costs' to consumers that were never incurred in the first place. A handful of large companies have gained tens of billions of Euros in un-earned, windfall profits this way (Laing et al. 2014: 513). By 2011 the top ten benefiting companies had enjoyed windfall profits four times the entire EU environment budget over the same period (Sandbag 2011).

Windfall profits, endemic in emissions trading, represent a transfer of income, with a few emissions-intensive producers making profits at the expense of consumers. Moreover, greater windfall profits tend to be accrued by installations with more carbon-intensive production (Laing et al. 2014: 515). All in all, the EU's ETS has not been cost-effective and has subsidised polluters, especially the worst polluters, at taxpayers' expense (Corporate Europe Observatory 2015).

David Peetz notes that some object to carbon pricing because of the corruption of trading markets by financiers and speculators. That, he argues, is a question of implementation, not principle (Peetz 2020). Accepting for the sake of argument that it is just a matter of devising the best possible scheme, let us assume that fraud and gaming do not occur and that companies which emit truly bear the costs of those emissions. What would happen then is that carbon pricing would have less deterrent effect on richer, better-resourced corporations more able than poorer competitors to absorb costs from paying for emissions. Larger players would drive smaller players out of the market. It would encourage monopolisation in the fossil fuels sector, arguably increasing rather than decreasing its power and influence.

So even well-designed carbon pricing advantages larger and more powerful emitters in relation to smaller and less powerful. It is hardly surprising that large corporations, such as BHP, prefer emissions trading to more effective climate policies. But their support should not be taken as proof that such mechanisms are the best way forward, as economists tend to conclude; on the contrary, their support indicates such mechanisms are the least effective way to discourage fossil fuel production and consumption fast enough to prevent catastrophe.

Emissions trading has the added bonus for coal exporters that it cannot deter emissions produced by Australian coal once it leaves Australia—and there is four times more of that than the amount consumed domestically. Carbon

pricing might have some deterrent effect on coal mining onshore but cannot deter emissions produced by that coal once it leaves Australia, a far greater contributor to global climate change than the emissions produced in the mining process. A meaningful and morally responsible emissions reduction policy should respond adequately to the enormous problem of Australia's outsourced emissions, as Jeremy Moss (2021) has urged.

Crucially, marketising carbon undermines public support for climate mitigation policies because corporations pass on costs to consumers and are perceived to be passing on costs. Carbon pricing exacerbates the secondary injustice of climate change. The *primary* injustice of climate change is that those who have contributed least to the problem of global warming will suffer most and are suffering most. The *secondary* injustice is that market-based mitigation policies predominantly harm poorer households, who pay disproportionately for emissions trading schemes and carbon taxes. They are therefore unpopular and give climate mitigation in general a bad name.

Since the 1990s the international trade union movement has developed the concept and practice of Just Transition to counteract this secondary injustice of climate change. It is well known that Just Transition is about guaranteeing that workers displaced from fossil fuel jobs are provided with equivalent incomes or alternative jobs as well paid as those lost and with the same opportunities for unionisation. But Just Transition is also about state action to phase out fossil fuels, withdrawing the massive subsidies to fossil fuel corporations, redirecting that public money to renewables, preventing fossil fuel corporations from making the public bear the cost of phasing out the dangerous fuels from which they have profited. Just Transition principles ensure that climate policies are fair and seen to be fair, and therefore secure working-class and poor people's acceptance and support, preventing fossil fuel interests pitting labour and environmental movements against each other to undermine mitigation efforts.

### The ETS Debacle

Apart from being inefficient and ineffective, neoliberal climate policies, such as the Rudd government's proposed CPRS, weaken support for climate action, because they are unfair and seen to be unfair. Denialist forces are invariably quick to exploit the situation. For example, in 2008 the Murdoch press seized upon and misreported a Lowy Institute poll of 1001 people conducted between 12 and 28 July, which asked how much extra per month they were prepared to pay on their electricity bills to help fight climate change: 'The 2008 Lowy Institute Poll reveals that Australians want action on climate change, but not if it ... hits them in the back pocket' (*Australian* 29 September 2008).

To make matters worse, the CPRS was seriously flawed, even by the low standards of emissions trading schemes. Its emissions reduction targets fell way short of the recommendations in the Report it had commissioned leading economist Ross Garnaut to provide; its cap was far too low and it ruled out greater reductions in the future. It gave excessive amounts of compensation to fossil fuel companies: \$7.4 billion compensation in the first two years, with a further \$2.25 billion designated primarily for coal-fired power stations. Companies were also granted free emissions permits: coal-fired power plants would have free permits valued at almost \$4 billion in the first five years of the scheme and 90 per cent of permits required by emissions-intensive activities were to be provided free (Australian Government 2008: xxiv-xxvi; Diesendorf 2009: 56). Garnaut himself had expressed a preference for a carbon tax and expressly warned against generous assistance to polluting industries that would encourage 'rent seeking behaviour rather than the pursuit of low-emissions production processes' (Garnaut 2008: 315-317). An *Age* headline on 17 December 2008 declared: 'Households pay as big polluters cash in on climate change.'

Climate scientists expressed dismay at the proposed scheme; environmental organisations vowed to campaign against it. A National Climate Action Summit in Canberra on 31 January-2 February 2009, attended by 500 people representing 150 climate action groups, unanimously opposed the CPRS legislation (Spratt 2009). Backed up by environmental organisations, Greens Senators branded the CPRS the 'Continue Polluting Regardless Scheme' and urged Labor to propose a better policy. They cited the problems already evident of emissions trading in the EU and pointed to glaring faults in the government's version of such a scheme: it gave billions in handouts to coal companies and polluters; Treasury modelling showed that under the CPRS there would be no reductions in emissions for 25 years; and any future attempt to strengthen the scheme would result in yet more billions of compensation payments to polluters. The Greens still defend their opposition to a 'bad policy that would have locked in failure to take action on climate change', which 'locked in emissions targets that failed the science', while giving 'a false impression it was actually going to do something' (Australian Greens 2022a).

Although opinion polls at the time indicated that, for the majority of Australians deeply concerned about climate change, disappointment was building at the miniscule nature of the projected emissions reductions, Labor ignored Greens' pleas to increase emissions reduction targets and decrease compensation to polluters. The Greens did not quite hold the balance of power in the Senate, so were unable to negotiate an acceptable scheme. Labor strategy deemed their support irrelevant,

a faulty assumption as it turned out. Instead, the Labor government kept weakening the CPRS further to try to secure Liberal Party backing. Changes negotiated with Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull, who favoured such market-based climate mitigation policy, doubled compensation to coal interests, gave out even more free emissions permits, increased compensation to companies for electricity price increases while reducing compensation to households. Despite these further concessions agreed with Turnbull, the Liberal Party, along with the Nationals, defeated the legislation for the third time in the Senate on 30 November 2009. However, two Liberal Senators—Suzanne Boyce and Judith Troeth—crossed the floor to support the CPRS, unexpectedly making the Greens' opposition relevant to the outcome.

Might the Greens have gritted their teeth and supported the defective legislation, if they had known these Liberal defections would happen? Possibly, but probably not. The Greens were convinced that the CPRS was so fundamentally flawed it really was worse than no legislation at all. The Labor government had handled Greens' criticisms and concerns so dismissively in its ill-fated bid to placate the Liberals. A more likely successful scenario is that a CPRS improved along lines the Greens advocated would have passed the final hurdle in the Senate with the support of Greens and the same two defecting Liberal Senators. Labor concedes no fault with the content of its CPRS nor with its strategy to pass it. Instead, Labor mythology holds up its CPRS as wonderful and reproaches the Greens who tried to make it at least worthwhile—and blames them entirely for its defeat, as though the Liberals' double dealing had nothing to do with its downfall.

On 1 December, Turnbull was replaced, by just one vote, as Liberal Party leader by Tony Abbott, who branded the CPRS a 'great big new tax' (*Australian* 2 December 2009: 1). The Senate's third-time rejection of the Bill gave the government pretext for a double dissolution election. To try to break the impasse, in early 2010 the government at last began negotiating with the Greens, Senator Xenophon and the dissident Liberal Senators over the Greens' proposal for an interim carbon tax (*Age* 23 February 2010: 1). This had good prospects of success in both Houses and ought to have been pursued, but this new opportunity to legislate much more effectively for reduced emissions was passed up by the Labor government.

Instead, on 27 April 2010 Rudd abruptly announced the CPRS would simply be shelved and reviewed again in 2012 (*Age* 27 April 2010:1). His decision was at odds with the mandate received at the 2007 election and also of opinion polls. A Lowy Institute poll released the day Rudd made that announcement found that 72 per cent

agreed 'Australia should take action to reduce its carbon emissions before a global agreement is reached' (Grattan and Arup 2010). Rudd's approval rating plummeted in the fastest collapse of support for a PM in the 20-year history of Newspoll and one of the two sharpest drops in the 40 years of Neilsen polls (Hartcher 2010a). By June, two-thirds of respondents polled could not distinguish between the two major parties on climate change politics (Davis 2010). Labor had thrown away the huge advantage it had clearly had.

Primary support for the Greens, who argued still for a better and stronger scheme and wanted to support that through parliament, rose to record figures in May 2010: 13 per cent according to Nielsen and 16 per cent according to Newspoll (Hartcher 2010b). A Newspoll on 1 June 2010 found the 16 per cent Greens' primary vote still held—the highest yet recorded for the Greens (Davis 2010). Moreover, a two-year study of attitudes towards emissions trading schemes, conducted by the Centre for the Study of Choice at the University of Technology, Sydney, found in July 2010 that the majority of the 7000 randomly selected people wanted to see a more ambitious and more immediate scheme than the one abandoned by the Rudd government, regardless of whether the US and China took similar steps (Cubby 2010). Rudd's decision to retreat from the CPRS instead of presenting a better scheme (and, if necessary, accepting defeat in the Senate as a double-dissolution trigger) was at odds with the wishes of the Australian people.

### **Just Transition: Unions Behaving Better than Labor**

The Rudd Labor government ignored its industrial wing just as much as it disregarded the Greens. Despite widespread media attempts to depict workers as hostile to climate change mitigation, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and its affiliated unions had since the early 1990s urged Labor governments to plan properly for transition to a greener future. The union movement argued for state action, not market tinkering, to achieve this, and because this was the fairest way forward for workers and poorer people.

In 1992 in *The Greenhouse Effect: Employment and Development Issues for Australians*, the ACTU had identified green employment as a key issue and called for immediate measures to reduce emissions. Had the Labor governments of the 1990s followed its policy suggestions, Australia would have become the global leader in emissions reduction and the cost of transition to a low carbon economy greatly reduced. The ACTU argued price measures would have an adverse effect on low-income earners and that regulatory and planning measures would be more efficient and effective (ACTU 1992). In 2008 the ACTU and Australian Conservation

Foundation (ACF) jointly published *Green Gold Rush. How An Ambitious Environmental Policy Can Make Australia a World Leader in the Global Race for Green Jobs*: strong action on climate and industry policy could create 500,000 additional green jobs by 2030 (ACTU/ACF 2008).

The ACTU position was supported by the union most affected, the Construction, Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), whose research officer had formulated the 1992 policy. In 2007 the CFMEU ran an advertisement in mining regions, with hard-hatted fossil fuel workers urging people to vote Labor to protect their jobs and communities: 'Choose a Government that's serious about climate change.' It called for proper plans to help coal communities face the inevitable low carbon future, declaring its members wanted to be part of the solution (Maher 2007; CFMEU 2009).

In mid-2008 the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) conducted a poll which showed that 93 per cent of workers in energy-intensive industry supported action on climate change 'if there is government support for new industries'. The union maintained the threat of climate change could become genuine opportunity with the right government policies and programs, such as public investment in new greener industries (AMWU 2008). At a Trade Union Climate Change Conference at Melbourne's Trades Hall on 9 October 2010, La Trobe Valley AMWU officials were scathing about the Labor government and its ETS, stating that markets were the problem not the solution to climate change: 'our members have had enough of market forces'. They argued for direct government intervention and regulation, with Just Transition strategies in place, because the costs of transition to renewables should not fall exclusively on workers displaced from the brown economy (Burgmann and Baer 2012: 223-225).

Ultimately, there are more jobs in an economy based on renewables rather than fossil fuels—and no jobs at all on a dead planet. Had the Rudd Labor government followed the forward-thinking advice of its affiliated unions—and adhered to the social-democratic principles upon which the Labor Party was founded—it would have responded to climate crisis with state action for the common good: banning new fossil fuel infrastructure; orderly phasing out of the remainder; withdrawing the billions of dollars of annual subsidies to fossil fuels and redirecting this money to renewable energy projects; providing Just Transition plans for workers losing jobs, with income guarantees or well-paid replacement jobs in renewable energy and other projects through public investment and incentives for private investment in a transition economy.

## The Carbon Tax

In 2011 the ACTU published *Climate Change is Union Business*, by which stage Julia Gillard had replaced Rudd as Prime Minister. The political fallout from Rudd Labor's policy choice, and its handling, had created internal instability for Labor; given subsequent Coalition governments ammunition to oppose mitigation; and heightened Labor-Greens climate wars. Notwithstanding red-green conflict, a brief period of Labor-Greens cooperation brought about the Gillard government's carbon pricing mechanism (CPM), a carbon tax by any other name. Labor could not this time ignore the Greens, as they had under Rudd: the 2010 election had returned a minority Labor government, dependent on the support in the House of Representatives of solitary Greens MP—Adam Bandt—and progressive Independents.

The carbon tax was also a market solution, but a 'market-adjusting' rather than 'market-creating' one. Though simpler and more direct than the ETS, the CPM was nonetheless complex (more money for the carbon-trading lobby). Frank Stilwell argues that, although the carbon tax was still a problematic example of 'marketising the environment', building a community focus on sustainability was more likely through common acceptance of a tax on bad behaviours than through the sale of rights to behave badly (Stilwell 2011: 114). However, like an emissions trading scheme, this market-based 'solution' carried with it the immense political baggage of cost-pass-through, actual and/or perceived.

Cost-pass-through was acknowledged by the Gillard government when it tried to ensure that poorer households were compensated for the resulting higher energy prices. People were not persuaded that they would not be bearing the costs of reducing emissions, rather than the emitters. The first Morgan poll after the carbon tax showed the Coalition with 60.5 per cent Two-Party Preferred and Labor with 39.5 per cent, its worst result since 1942. While most people wanted climate change mitigation, only 37 per cent supported the tax and 58 per cent opposed it; 62 per cent thought it would have no effect on reducing emissions and 32 per cent believed it was designed to achieve upwards wealth redistribution. Morgan (2011) concluded: 'the Government's message of using the carbon tax to help prevent global warming is being drowned out by discussion about how it will impact upon household budgets.'

The ETS shambles undoubtedly contributed to wariness and weariness with carbon pricing. In this environment, the Gillard government's attempts to recompense poorer households added to the cost and complexity of the CPM but could not assuage concerns about cost-pass-through. Whether emissions trading or carbon taxation, carbon

pricing cannot garner broad public support, because it exacerbates the secondary injustice of climate change. By doing so, carbon pricing emboldens fossil fuel interests to mobilise against climate mitigation in general. Tony Abbott used the opportunity to 'pledge in blood' to undo the carbon tax. Though better than Rudd's ETS, and successful in slightly reducing emissions (Flannery 2020: 25), the CPM still encountered this political problem of cost-pass-through. So Abbott was elected to repeal it and climate deniers rejoiced.

### **Nine Nasty Years: 2013-2022**

Labor-Greens climate wars broke out again after 2013. Preferring to disown the period of Labor-Greens cooperation, Labor activists harped upon the history of the CPRS, blaming the Greens not the Coalition for its fate. This reflex blame game discouraged any scrutiny of that policy choice and encouraged Labor to remain trapped in a false dichotomy between jobs and climate action. It could have cut through this with ambitious Just Transition plans, such as those pursued by Labor State governments. These governments have implemented Just Transition plans from above and supported Just Transition strategies emanating from below, working with communities in areas dependent on coal and coal-fired power, for example in Collie in Western Australia and in Gippsland in Victoria (Government of Western Australia 2020; Communities Leading Change 2021).

At federal level, however, Labor's reluctance to embrace ambitious Just Transition delivered the disastrous 2019 election result. Labor wedged itself on the issue of climate action: telling workers in regional Queensland seats that coal would keep on going; implying to voters elsewhere that it knew coal was bad. Labor's 2019 policy stated that it had no plans to phase out coal and it supported gas as a 'transition fuel'. It would set up an independent Just Transition Authority 'to plan and coordinate the structural adjustment response to inevitable future station closures'—but this was a reactive rather than proactive policy (Australian Labor Party 2019; Climate Council 2019: 3-9). It made it clear that it would not encourage orderly, faster phasing out. The market would decide.

The Centre for Future Work argues that sudden market-driven closures are far worse for fossil fuel workers than planned ones and that it is cruel and deceptive to tell them their jobs have a future, instead of working with them to plan for transition, which would also be hugely beneficial economically, as other parts of the world have found (Stanford 2020). Moreover, offering a clear vision for affected communities of a sustainable secure future based on new jobs, as well paid as those being replaced, brings together climate mitigation and employment issues. To do otherwise allows these issues to be counterposed, with terrible electoral consequences, as we saw in 2019.

Unsurprisingly, Labor blamed former Greens' leader Bob Brown's 'Adani Convoy' for its poor performance in regional Queensland. The Adani Convoy would not have happened if federal Labor and Queensland Labor had opposed the Adani mine and instead proposed detailed and far-reaching Just Transition plans for fossil fuel communities. The Greens 2019 policy platform did have comprehensive Just Transition policies for such areas, but these became submerged, because most press reporting of the tactically unwise Convoy predictably portrayed it as southern greenies not caring about workers' jobs.

The lengthy review of Labor's 2019 loss acknowledged that 'Labor did not effectively discuss the cost of not acting on climate change or the job opportunities a transition to a renewable energy future could bring' yet recommended that 'Labor should recognize coal mining will be an Australian industry into the foreseeable future' and again took aim at Greens. Labor's 'ambiguous language on Adani' was a problem, not in itself, but because the Adani Convoy drew attention to it: 'Brown's caravan ... had the effect of highlighting Labor's ambiguous position on the Adani proposal and enabled the Coalition repeatedly to reaffirm its unequivocal support for the mine ... the earlier 2010 alliance with the Greens meant Labor was vulnerable to the Coalition's claims Labor shared the Greens' position ... to oppose the mine' (Emerson and Weatherill 2019: 61, 31, 35, 38, 45).

### **Election 2022 and Beyond**

On 23 April 2021 the ACTU declared: 'Australian workers need a climate plan with ambition' and 'a national just transition plan with funding and support for workers and communities impacted both by the climate crisis and by a shift to cleaner technologies' (Australian Unions 2021). The Greens 2022 climate policy taken to the 2022 election argued for 75 per cent emissions reduction on 2005 levels by 2030: 'We don't need to choose between taking urgent climate action and supporting coal communities. We can do both.' It outlined its plan to rein in fossil fuels directly through comprehensive transition plans that would give fossil fuel workers certainty and financial security because, when mines close without a plan, only one in three workers would find another job (Australian Greens 2022b; Australian Greens 2022c).

Labor's 2022 election policy committed to 43 per cent emissions reduction but, like its 2019 policy, had no clear transition plans, continuing instead to support many new coal and gas projects. Climate Action Tracker (2022a, 2022b) considered its policy incompatible with keeping below 1.5 degrees of global warming. Ten leading scientists ranked Labor's climate policy ahead of the Coalition's but deemed it inadequate without a clear commitment to phasing out coal (Age, 14 May 2022: 8).

While the Greens insist that government should phase out fossil fuels in a systematic, coherent manner and support workers in the process, the Albanese government maintains the market must decide.

The appropriate social-democratic response to climate crisis is not faith in markets but mandating an orderly phasing out of fossil fuels with Just Transition for the workers affected. Labor repeatedly vacates this space for the Greens yet resents their existence. The carbon lobby has sabotaged climate policy in Australia; but the carbon-trading lobby's capture of the Rudd government saw it squander a crucial policy moment. It's Time for Labor to stop blaming the Greens for preventing legislation they were justified in wishing to improve. Had Labor pursued Just Transition instead of the marketing concoction of emissions trading it would have significantly reduced both emissions and red-green conflicts, made climate mitigation more popular and strengthened its traditional support base. It could have won more elections. Labor's neoliberal policy foray damaged both the planet and the party.

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## A Change in Heart

Only a sky of stars could understand  
my heart and its melancholic chambers.  
To see you marvel at the world,  
I could never fall away from the gift of us.  
Drown me in your words,  
Oh how I crave your glances,  
all but the absence of your voice.

How the crowds worship you  
with admiration, false or true.  
Among them, only one loves your mangled soul.  
I have learnt the blotches of your heart,  
yet only mine aches for its presence.

A brightness obscured when I look upon your face,  
Mind deconstructed, only yours I want to trace.  
Entangled you are, in my mind.  
Love, you are my fate, but for you,  
I am only the deepest secret nobody knows.  
Enfold my heart, I bide my time.

Indulge myself in your sea of emotion.  
All have forgotten how softly one walks.  
Must I feel this way?  
How an anchored gaze or a waft of your scent  
undoes a heart so delicately.  
How in one's eyes,  
a plethora of words come through.  
The air trembles and the water shimmers at a mere  
possibility.  
Hearts bursting, heat radiating,  
palm in palm, your touch of an angel.

We were the spark to set each other ablaze,  
But two broken people cannot fix each other.  
Fallen to your knees, now  
I only ask that you leave a clue.

Love wraps me in a suffocating embrace,  
so if music be the food of love, play on.  
I loathe myself for wishing I would be  
the sole one to entwine hands with you.  
To go on seems absurd, please,  
take me where your heart is.

I feel everything, watching them with you.  
Alas, I see that same look in your eyes,  
Only this time,  
I am not in the reflection.

- forever never means forever

MEGAN LIEM

\*Commended entry from the 2022 Seeking Asylum Poetry prize